

Practical English Writing

英语应用文写作

周邦友/主编



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Preface

There is a Chinese proverb that says: "a workman must first sharpen his tools if he wants to do his work well." As English majors, or just lovers of the English language, we should know how to put the skills we learn into practice. The purpose of this book, *Practical English Writing*, is to teach us how to use the English we have learned in the proper context so that we can communicate effectively.

"Practical English" is not a special English vocabulary. It is a straightforward English used in everyday work situations. Practical writing communicates specific and factual information to a defined audience for a defined purpose. The information is useful in nature, and this is what makes practical writing differ from writing fiction, for example.

Practical writing is based on the principle that writing is a purposeful process involving discovery, precision in thought and language, and sensitivity to the audience. It emphasizes how writers think, explains how writing affects promising writers, and offers clear guidance in the writing process.

Found in any form of written communication, practical writing varies from language to language. But they all have one thing in common: form and content. So far as practical English writing is concerned, Chinese learners of English should keep in mind that practical English writing is somewhat different from practical Chinese writing.

The organization of this book reflects the essential task confronting writers. Writing occurs in a context that influences the writer throughout the process, from conception of the subject to the choice of particular words. The book consists of ten parts, which I think are the most relevant to the practical use of English. The first section deals with general remarks on practical English writing, and the second part functions as a guide for letter writing. The following eight segments provide direction for various types of letters, secretarial work, information and publicity, legal documents, personal data, academic writing, note-taking, and the use of punctuation marks.

During my years of experience as a teacher teaching English to Chinese students, including English majors, I have discovered that the same mistakes crop up again and again in practical English writing. Actually, some students frequently cannot distinguish the difference between English and Chinese in practical writing. Students get into the habit of thinking first in Chinese, and then put what they think into English. When they write a letter, for example, they begin with an introduction like: "I am sorry to spare your time to read my letter." What is worse, most students do not know the system of practical English writing, and what they write is restricted to the Chinese form. Taking resume writing for example, some Chinese students write their resumes in a block format, usually in one paragraph. This would be unacceptable if directed to an employer in English. Resumes written in English should be divided into the following sections: personal information, qualifications (if needed), education, work experience, publications (if there are), membership, awards, and hobbies. This book, therefore, aims at helping students learn the precise method of practical writing in English.

Those who will benefit most from this book are the students who are English majors, students in other programs involving foreign af-

fairs, and those who just love the English language. It will be beneficial to those whose work is internationally oriented.

Whether you are majoring in the English language, or other programs involving international affairs, starting a fresh career in your life, venturing into a new enterprise, or just writing a business letter, drafting a contract, or preparing your graduation paper, you will find this book, *Practical English Writing*, to be a valuable one.

To the many friends and colleagues who have offered their support and suggestions, I should like to express my gratitude. These include Drs. Anne and Clay Denman, Dr. Lyon Evans, Dr. David Hedrick, Ms. Barbara Hodges, Dr. Dekuan Huang. Dr. Michael Launius, Mr. Jianquan Liu, Dr. Richard Rosecky, Dr. Deirdre Smythe, and Dr. Roger Yu.

Special thanks should be given to my mentor, Dr. Edward Golden, Professor Emeritus, Central Washington University of the United States, for his encouragement and for providing many of the reference materials, without which this book would not have been possible. Ms Zhanghua Zhu proofread the entire manuscript and offered invaluable suggestions and comments.

For their generosity, I am also indebted to the publishers and authors listed in the bibliography.

Finally, no book can come to life without an excellent editor. For this I credit my friend and advisor Ms. Xiaohong Cao whose diligent efforts improved the manuscript in way that can only be described as brilliant.

Bangyou Zhou

Nantong University

December 12, 2004

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Part 1

General Remarks on Practical English Writing

1.1 *Definition of Practical Writing*

Practical English is not a special language — it is simply English used in the situations of practical work. Practical English writing communicates specific and factual information to a particular audience for a specific purpose. The information is practical, and sometimes technical, in nature, and this is what makes practical writing different from other types of writing. Broadly, that audience includes individual readers, managerial readers, technical readers, or even, at times, general readers. The purpose of practical writing is to inform, instruct, or explain to the audience who read it. Writers, therefore, should always take readers into first consideration.

In practical writing, readers should always come first. Although it is tempting to first consider content, approach, and style, writers should not do this at the expense of clarity. Keep in mind that the purpose of practical writing is to inform — make sure what is written should fit the reader's level of understanding. It is generally accepted that readers determine the success of any piece of writing. It does